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ABSTRACT

Teachers can use a variety of techniques to help students learn to manage the writing process of generating ideas, writing, and revising material. To assist students in developing their ideas about a topic, acquiring additional information, and integrating new information with previous ideas--all part of the generating phase--teachers can give instruction in brainstorming, free association, freewriting, evaluating information, and selecting methods for organizing material. To provide young writers with relevant support and instruction during the drafting process, teachers can model unfamiliar genres, permit imitation in early drafts, allow class time for writing, and encourage nongraded writing such as journal writing. To help students learn when and how to revise, teachers can organize peer response and editing groups, model the revising process in class, engage in written dialogue with students about their evolving drafts, and provide time between drafts to allow students to reassess their own writing. (MM)

LEARNING TO MANAGE THE WRITING PROCESS:

TASKS AND STRATEGIES

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Introduction

In recent years, the professional literature has often reminded us of the need to focus on writing as a process--for students to write more often and for teachers to react to the ideas being expressed rather than to mechanics and form, particularly in early drafts. Although the advice is sound and well motivated, there have been few explicit guidelines for how to put it into practice.

In this article, we will suggest a number of specific activities to help teachers implement a process approach. We hope to show that by drawing upon many activities that are familiar to most English teachers, as well as a few that are less frequently used, implementing a process approach need be neither revolutionary nor unrealistically time consuming.

An effective writing program extends both the range of purposes for which students write and the range of writing strategies appropriate to those purposes. Young writers need to learn how to vary their writing process in response to the needs of the particular writing task; they need a flexible repertoire of techniques to help in planning, drafting, and revising their work.

To accomplish this, it is especially important that teachers help their students see writing as a process that takes place over a period of time; this helps them break the writing task into a series of more manageable problems, problems that can be solved gradually rather than all at once. A focus on the conventions of written language--spelling, punctuation, usage--, for example, can be postponed until a draft is ready to be polished for a wider audience; generating and organizing material to write about can precede the

task of getting out a first draft; first drafts can be seen as early parts of the process of thinking a piece through, rather than as final statements of a developed point of view.

We can see some aspects of this process in twelve-year-old Celia's struggles with an essay on life in the United States. This is a topic about which Celia had considerable information, but she had not thought it through very carefully. This is very evident in the first draft, which becomes a kind of index or outline of points that might be made.

> Why is the United States a Good Place to Live?
> Because we dont have a shortage of food like maybe other states I like the United States because it is a free country. We grow most of the crops. I like the United States because you can take any job you want. All of the relatives could visit us North Germany cant I like the United States.

At this point, what Celia needed most was to develop some of the ideas more thoroughly, to flesh out some of the topics mentioned in passing in the first draft. Her second draft begins to do this, although it is still rather diffuse.

> Why is the United States a Good Place to Live?
> The United States is a good place to live because its more of a free country than others, you can come and go as you please, and the laws are more free. We accept immigrants and other places don't.

Also our food qualities, and merchandise quality is very good.

We don't have slaves and you can take any job you want, your color doesn't really matter. Black, white, yellow your color nor your nationality really doesn't matter, it doesn't separate you from the others.

But there are some ups and downs in the world.

Celia treated her first draft as a way to get started, a source of ideas to elaborate on in the second draft. She shared the second draft with a friend, who liked the parts about "freedom" and thought the other comments weren't very important. Celia drew on these reactions in her third attempt.

Freedom and Equlity in the U.S.A.

The united States is a good place to live because its more of a free country than others. People can come and go as they please, and the laws give them more freedom than other countries. The United States accept immigrants and other countries don't. People from all over the world can visit the United States while some other countries won't even let people visit their relatives.

The United States doesn't allow slavery and people

can choose the kind of work they do. Color and nationality don't really matter in the jobs people get or the way they are treated. The United States doesn't separate people by the way they look or the language they speak. It is nicer to live in the United States than other places.

Although this third attempt is far from perfect, the progression from the first draft is clear. Celia has learned that her writing could have its own history, and is willing to treat her early attempts as work-in-progress. She has also learned a few simple strategies for carrying the process through: she used the first draft as a way to generate ideas, and she sought out the reaction of a sympathetic reader to help her assess whether she was making her points clearly. By the third draft, Celia was ready to share her work with her teacher. Together, they can continue the process that Celia has begun on her own, sharpening and elaborating the theme as well as the organization of the essay as a whole.

Young writers learn to manage their writing processes by broadening their repertoire of strategies for generating ideas, producing drafts, and revising work in progress. Teachers can help by treating successive drafts as part of this process of development, rather than as final products to evaluate. The sections which follow illustrate some of the ways that teachers can help students learn new generating, drafting, and revising skills.

Generating

During the generating phases of the writing process, writers develop their ideas about a topic, acquire additional information or experience

relevant to the writing task, integrate the new information with previous ideas and experiences, and begin to organize their material in an appropriate fashion. Generation of ideas is part of all writing tasks, though the nature of the process is substantially influenced by the writer's purpose.

Experienced writers use a variety of activities for generating ideas for their writing. Novice writers need to learn specific techniques for gathering and organizing information, as well as ways to judge whether the material they have to work with is appropriate and sufficient for a specific writing task. The activities which follow illustrate some of the ways in which generating skills can be fostered in students of all ages.

A. Drawing on Relevant Knowledge and Experience

1. Use brainstorming and free association activities to draw out what students already know about a particular topic. In informational or persuasive writing, these activities may focus on a central idea related to the "point" of the writing. In literary writing, similar activities can focus on a mood, setting, or type of character. Individuals should be encouraged to list all of the ideas and associations that come to mind, without conscious editing or selection. When these are carried out as group activities, students may develop a much broader sense of what is relevant than if they were working alone.

2. Use freewriting to help writers begin to draw upon their ideas about specific topics, or to make them aware of their current concerns. Usually, freewriting serves as a source of ideas to develop further, rather than as an initial draft for a more polished piece.

3. Teach students how to use their class notes, textbooks, and other study materials as resources when writing about topics they are studying in their classes. If students are asked to take notes, they need a clear sense of the purpose of the notetaking activity.
4. Use a variety of specific stimuli to crystalize ideas and emotions before writing stories or poems. Music, photographs, films, other literary works--these and many other forms provide a core around which writers can focus their ideas and experiences.
5. Pool ideas and experiences in group discussions. Together a group will ennumerate a variety of related ideas which can then be organized to provide an initial structure (however temporary) for the writing task.
6. Help students recognize that conscious awareness of the intended audience and purpose for writing affect the ideas that are included, the way they are organized, and the manner in which they are expressed. As a group or class activity, students can discuss what a particular audience knows or believes about a topic. Similarly, they can discuss the kinds of arguments or information the particular audience is likely to find interesting or convincing, as well as the kinds they are likely to reject.
7. Have groups of students work together to develop sets of questions to ask about a particular topic. This helps them focus on what they know and how that relates to the writing task. Depending upon the overall purpose for writing and the

place in the writing task where the group discussion occurs, the questions can focus on such things as key ideas, supporting details, sequences of events, emotional reactions, relevant issues, or underlying values and beliefs.

B. Gathering Additional Information

Although idea generation may receive the most emphasis in the early or prewriting stages, generating of new information continues throughout most writing tasks. At all stages, students need to learn to evaluate the information they presently have available and to gather more information whenever it is needed. If more information is needed, a review of sources and an ordering of their likely usefulness can follow.

1. Students can review possible sources of information in small groups or with partners. The usefulness of specific sources will vary with the particular topic and purpose for writing; among other sources, students should consider the school or public library, interviews with specific people, and direct experience or observation.
2. Teach students to judge the information available for immediate use and to consider the need for referring to additional sources at any and all points in the writing process.

C. Organizing the Information

Early in the generating task, writers make initial plans for presenting information. These plans may be as general as "I am going to write a story about Daniel Boone escaping from the Indians," or as specific as a list of major causes of the Civil War. At this point, writers review what

they know that is relevant to the writing task, and integrate newly obtained information with their previous ideas and experiences. Instructional activities at this stage can help students organize the information they have gathered, in the context of the particular purpose for writing.

1. Plan instructional activities that will help students organize information in ways directly related to the task at hand. In tasks where narrative is appropriate, or where steps in a procedure need to be outlined, this might involve ordering the available information in appropriate time sequences. In writing reports or explanations, this might involve identifying major points and supporting details, or organizing specific items into more general categories. Group discussion can be used to consider a variety of organizing schemes, and to select and defend those most appropriate for the specific writing task.
2. When an initial organization has been obtained, group discussion can be used to help writers elaborate the points they wish to make or the effects they wish to create. The discussion can focus on developing specific examples, or on generating supporting details to complete the writing task effectively.
3. Provide opportunities for students to talk about what they will write. Talk, whether in the context of a large group or with a single partner, can be a powerful technique in beginning to organize for a writing task. Talking about the topic leads the speaker to begin to trace out relationships among the ideas being discussed, or to find an initial shape for a literary experience. At the same time, the discussion provides an

audience who will ask for information in a supportive social context, making suggestions or asking for clarification when a point is unclear or a presentation ineffective.

Drafting

Drafting, the process of putting words on paper, is one of the most difficult parts of the writing process. It is the stage of writer's block, of frustrated openings, of seeing things go wrong without really knowing what to do next. Because drafting can be such a frustrating process, it is particularly important to provide young writers with relevant support and instruction.

Success during the drafting process depends upon a number of factors. One is simply adequate preparation, the kinds of idea generation discussed in the previous sections. Another is a sense of the conventions of the genre, the broad organizational patterns appropriate for a particular writing task. A third is an awareness of the place of a particular draft in the evolution of a final product. If other drafts will follow, rough spots can be repaired later, when the shape of the whole piece may be clearer. Fourth is a sense of what to do when the process breaks down, a repertoire of strategies to rekindle the flow of words. The activities which follow illustrate some of the ways that teachers can help students through the drafting task.

1. Model the drafting process, particularly with new or unfamiliar genres. Short pieces can be composed in whole class or group settings to heighten the sense of what is appropriate to a particular purpose for writing.
2. Use story-starters or opening sentences, to carry the student

past the problem of how to begin.

3. Permit imitation in early drafts. Often students need to borrow a style and recognize how it work before they can move toward a more original piece.
4. Provide students with a clear sense of the overall dimensions of the writing task. If they are writing about new material, expect initial drafts to be messy and imperfect, steps along the way toward a final product.
5. When the writing task is new or difficult, segment or structure the drafting process to provide as much help as possible. An unfamiliar essay form, for example, may be broken down into several paragraphs which, when assembled, make a coherent whole. Long narrative writing can be structured around "chapters," each of which represents one complete episode or adventure. Reports on science experiments can be structured around separate procedures, findings, and interpretations sections.
6. Provide class time for writing. Writers need some place to turn when things go wrong, whether to ask "What's the word that means..." or "How many stanzas is a sonnet supposed to have?" Class time spent as a writing workshop is a simple way to provide support for the drafting process, allowing students to help one another as well as to receive help from the teacher. Too often, the only in-class writing students are asked to do is writing for examinations--where the tensions of first-draft writing are accentuated by the knowledge of the evaluation that will inevitably follow. In a workshop atmosphere, on the other hand, teachers can

circulate freely, helping students develop their own strategies for solving the problems they encounter while producing their drafts.

7. Encourage freewriting, journal writing, and the use of "logs" in which students can become comfortable with the drafting process, secure in the knowledge that they will not be evaluated for what they have said or how they have said it. Such activities offer valuable experience in using writing to explore ideas and experiences at a stage preliminary to sharing them with wider audiences.

Revising

For experienced writers, revision is a natural part of any writing episode. Some revisions may be completely internal, as parts of the writing task are thought through and revised before anything is committed to paper. More obviously, pages are begun and abandoned, later drafts are reconsidered and restructured, and final drafts get polished and edited before sharing with more public audiences. How much revision takes place will depend on many factors, including the experience of the writer, the familiarity of the topic, and the purpose for writing in the first place. In any case, the revision process is an important part in the history of a piece of writing; through revision, a piece of writing "evolves" rather than being simply "transcribed."

Young writers must learn when to revise, and how to go about it. Revising one's own writing is especially difficult because writers know what they intended to say, and usually have great difficulty recognizing when this intention has gone awry. Obtaining responses to early drafts is thus an important part of the revising process, for novice and experienced writers

alike. Simply knowing that something has gone wrong, however, is often not sufficient; writers must develop strategies for remedying the problems they become aware of, whether at the level of individual words or of the organization of a draft as a whole. The activities that follow can help writers develop such revision skills.

A. Using Responses from Others

Experienced writers seek the reactions of others throughout the writing process. Students must learn to do this as well. Classroom instruction can encourage students to seek the reactions of others during all phases of writing.

1. Early in the writing process, peer response groups can be used to discuss information that has been gathered, to suggest points they would like to learn more about, and to suggest alternative points or interpretations.
2. After an intial draft has been completed, response groups can provide the writer with a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the draft. To insure that responses are constructive and detailed, response guides can focus the groups' attention on such questions as what interested them most in the paper, what they would like to know more about, or where they became confused. In reacting to literary writing, response groups might be asked to comment on what they thought about a particular character, what mood or tone the piece seemed to create, or what sections seemed particularly exciting or effective.

3. Late in the writing process, students can work in editing groups to suggest ways in which a paper might be "polished" before sharing with a wider audience. At this stage, sentences may be reshaped for effect as well as accuracy; word choice may be varied for tone or mood; possible misspellings may be identified and checked; and conventions of punctuation may be reviewed.

B. Learning to Revise One's Own Work

It is not enough simply to recognize problems in one's writing; effective writers must learn how to correct the problems they see.

1. Model the revising process by working through part of a paper with a student, discussing the effects of possible revisions. Have the writer continue the revision process in other parts of the paper.
2. Show students how to develop an outline after they have completed a first or second draft. Then use the outline to identify information that is needed, digressions that should be deleted, points that are out of place, and other lapses in coherence.
3. Engage in written dialogue with students about their evolving drafts. Focus your questions toward specific changes that students can incorporate in the next draft. Such questions as "Did you mean to say...," "Tell me how she knew this," or "I am confused about..." point the writer toward specific revisions while keeping the focus on what the writer intended to say. General comments such as "This is unclear," "Awkward," or "Use more details" offer little concrete help to a struggling writer.

4. Provide time between drafts to allow students a chance to reassess their own writing. Experienced writers often allow a draft to "incubate" for days or weeks before trying to make revisions. This time helps writers distance themselves from what they have written, making it much easier to notice parts that are unclear, irrelevant, or in need of elaboration.

The Process as a Whole

The activities suggested here illustrate a variety of techniques that can be used to help students learn to manage the writing process; there are many others which any teacher will want to add from his or her own experience. In planning classroom writing activities, it is important to keep in mind the relationship between a given writing task and the students' overall growth as writers. Aspects of the writing process that individuals can already manage adequately on their own should not be belabored; the techniques we have been discussing will be most effective when they are introduced to help students develop strategies and complete tasks that would otherwise be too difficult for them.

When students are writing about familiar topics in a familiar genre--stories based on personal experience, for example--prewriting activities may be appropriately minimized; attention might focus instead on strategies for assessing audience reaction to initial drafts, for telling whether the story "works" or not. In assignments involving unfamiliar topics or genres, on the other hand, instruction might focus on strategies for gathering material, organizing and focussing it in appropriate ways, and structuring early drafts to reflect the conventions of the unfamiliar genre. As students

gain experience in the new genre, they will begin to internalize these strategies and the teacher's attention can shift toward other parts of the writing process.

The skillful teacher must find the right balance, stretching the student in each new writing task, without stretching so far that the task becomes impossible, or labored and dull.

This article is based on a background paper prepared for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.